

FALLEN NATIONS

SERBIA'S STRUGGLE AGAINST FATE

The Little Gatekeeper to the Balkans on the Oldest and Shortest Road to the East Only Rose From a Long Age of Subjection to Be Again the Sport of Conquering Empires—One of the Most Perilous Spots on the Map.

BY JAMES MORGAN

Mr. Morgan today takes his readers to the latest storm center in the war and one of the most perilous spots on the map, where Serbia, the plucky little gatekeeper of the Balkans, is falling again her hard destiny—to be struck down and overrun by great Powers marching along the oldest and shortest road between Europe and Asia Minor. There one of the tragedies of history is being enacted anew under our eyes.

Another article will be published next Sunday in this series of sketches of the Balkan Nations.

Why should poor Serbia have become the storm center in the Balkans? Why did the eagles of the Teutonic Empires swoop down upon her? Not merely because a Serb assassinated the Austrian Crown Prince. Why did the big Empires of the Entente drop everything else to go to her rescue. Not merely as the chivalrous protectors of little Nations.

Serbia's destiny is written in her geography. Nations no less than men are the creatures and the creations of their environment.

England and Japan were made by their tight little islands, and France and Italy by their Alpine barriers. Spain is what she is because of the Pyrenees. Holland was made by her dykes. Russia by her remote and boundless plains, and America by her continent. Not the Turk but Constantinople is the maker of Turkey. And Serbia owes all her troubles today, owes a thousand years of trouble, to her unfortunate position on the map.

The Gates of Two Worlds.

The Balkan Peninsula is the crossway, a tongue of land uniting two worlds. At the top of it the Alpine spurs of Bosnia and the Carpathian Mountains of Transylvania draw together and leave only a gap into Serbia. At the bottom of the peninsula the seas close in upon it about Constantinople, leaving a mere bridge head for a passage over into the Orient. Serbia and Constantinople thus are the double gates between east and west, and all the empires in the past have struggled, even as the empires now are struggling, to seize and hold one or both of them. The Kaiser is marching through Serbia today along the very highway constructed by the Caesars between those gates, and their imperial foes are trying to stop their advance along that old Roman road to world dominion, the shortest land route from Europe to Asia Minor.

In the twilight of the Roman empire, barbarian hordes burst through the upper gate and blocked the traffic. Thereupon a monarch of the eastern empire at Constantinople, looking for a new and vigorous gatekeeper to clear the road, invited a mountain tribe of the great Slavic family to come down out of their Carpathian wilds and tend the gate. On that invitation, the Serbs settled 1,300 years ago in the valley of the Morava River, from which the Austro-German armies have lately driven them.

For centuries they guarded the road against the Magyars, the Tartars, the Bulgars and other new coming barbarians. Meanwhile the gatekeepers adopted Christianity, organized themselves into a kingdom and finally against Serbia today along the very highway constructed by the Caesars between those gates, and their imperial foes are trying to stop their advance along that old Roman road to world dominion, the shortest land route from Europe to Asia Minor.

When Serbia Was an Empire.

In that Balkan war of 1280 the strikers gathered at Nish, where the road forks, one branch running straight on to Constantinople, through Bulgaria, and the other down through Macedonia to Salonica on the Aegean Sea. Hastily advancing by the upper road the Serbs caught the Bulgars before the Rumanians or the Imperial army could come to their support. At one blow they overwhelmed Bulgaria and shattered the alliance.

All the Balkans and Constantinople as well now seemed to lay at the mercy of the victorious Serbs. At once they set forth on the path of conquest, under the leadership of their 22-year-old monarch, Stephen Dushan, the most illustrious name on Serbia's page of history. Hurling back the ever-restless Magyars of Hungary in the North and chasing the Albanian raiders into the deep recesses of their mountains, Dushan proclaimed himself King of the Albanians as well as of the Serbs. At the same time, he converted Bulgaria into a mere protectorate, and marched through Macedonia, he carried the frontier of his kingdom into Thessaly and Thrace.

At a splendid coronation in Uskub the conqueror put on an imperial crown, proclaiming himself emperor of the Serbs, Bulgars and Rumanians, of the Albanians and the Albanians. Virtually all the Balkans were gathered beneath the Serbian imperial rule, and the emperor next marked out Constantinople for conquest. He wanted to hold the lower as well as the upper gate to the old road.

But Constantinople has been the Carcass of many ambitious warriors. Only twice has a conqueror succeeded in breaching its stubborn walls in all the 1,500 years and more since they were reared by Constantine the Great. And when Dushan was almost in sight of St. Sofia, death suddenly and mysteriously arrested his triumphant advance.

The Fall of Serbia.

The high tide of the Serbian empire broke and ebbed. The Turk instead became the keeper of the Constantinople gate, and his irresistible janizaries pressed northward to seize the opposite gate. Thus Serbia found herself not the conqueror of the East, but the defender of the West.

As the Mohammedans forced their way up the Balkan peninsula, Serbia's mountain pass became the outpost of Christendom, with the Serbs valiantly upholding the cross against the crescent until overwhelmed at Kosovo in 1282. After 500 years have passed the Serbian banners still chant probably are chanting in the camps of the retreating Serbs today, their story of the great battle fought on Kosovo's "field of black birds," where the Turkish horses stood haunch to haunch, head to tail, and "not a drop of rain could fall to the earth between them." The plain, they tell us, was transformed by the enemy's banners into a far-stretching garden of bright tulips, and over it gleamed a sheet of flame woven by Turkish lances quivering in the June sun.

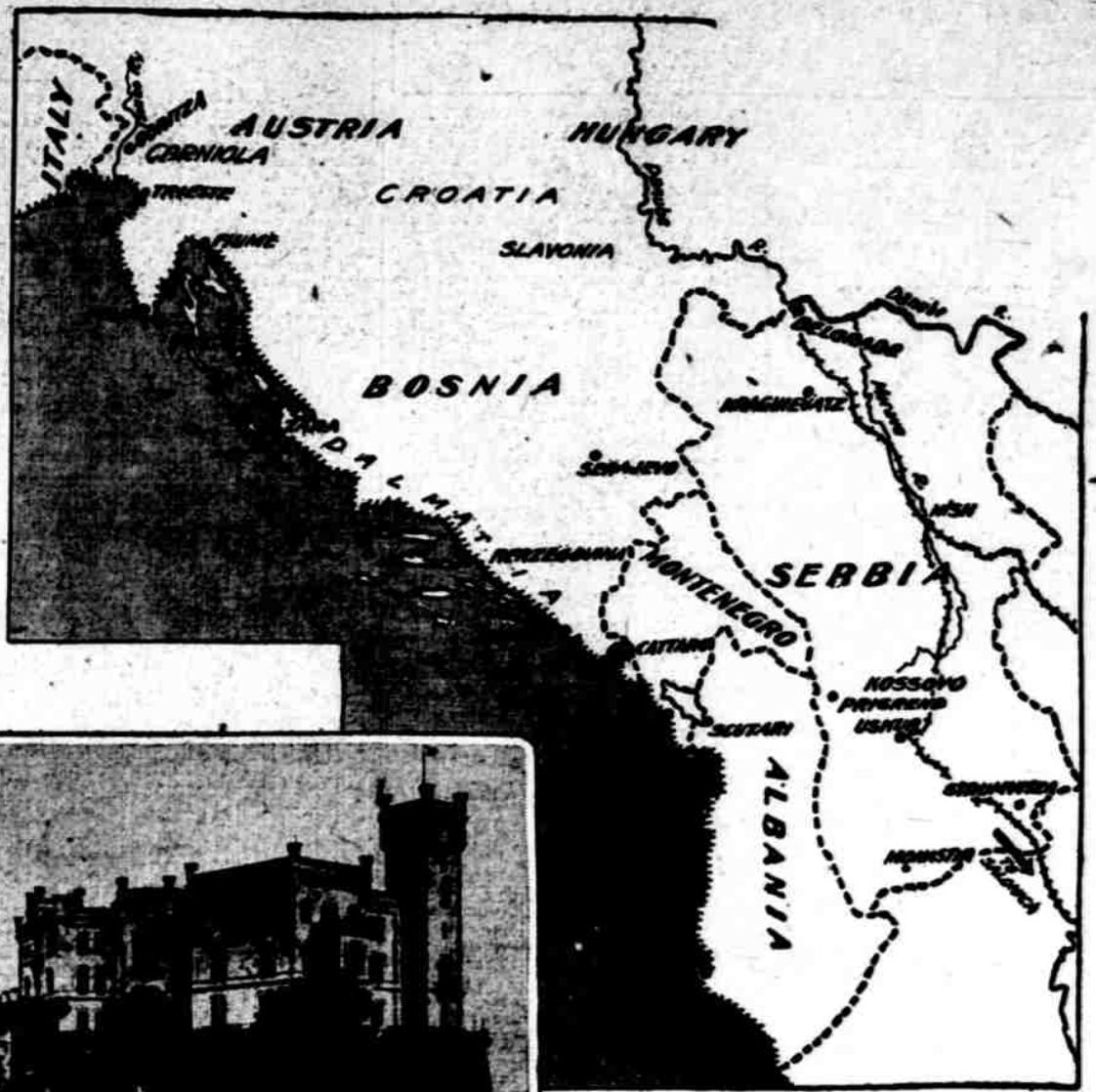
As the Serbian empire fell, with all the flower of Serbia's heroes lying about it in heaps of slain, a terrible revenge was taken on the victor. Killed up to the Turkish Sultan, a Serb killed him in the door of his tent. Whereupon the Turks cut off the head of the captured



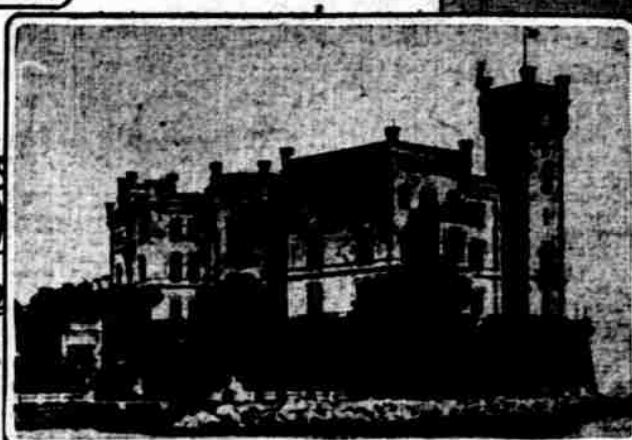
THE OLD ROMAN ROAD FROM THE WEST INTO THE EAST—A SCENE AT NISH IN SERBIA



MOUNTAIN INFANTRYMEN OF SERBIA WHO DEFENDED THEIR NATIVE SOIL LONG IN VAIN



SERBIA AND THE FALLEN NATIONS OF THE SERBS



THE CASTLE OF MIRAMAR, OLD HOME OF MAXIMILIAN OF MEXICO ON THE ADRIATIC, CLOSE BY THE AUSTRO-ITALIAN BATTLE FRONT.



THE ABANDONED PALACE OF SERBIA'S KINGS AT BELGRADE

monarch of Serbia before the glazed eyes of the dying Sultan.

For five centuries Serbia was under the heel of the Turk and for five centuries she remained in a state of rebellion, giving the Sultan more trouble than any other member of his ill-assorted family. He dismembered her and dispersed her people, until at last none but the poor peasants were left in the land. Every seventh year for generations he snatched all Serbian boys from their parents and carried them off into captivity, where he made them over into Moslems and trained them to be his janizaries, that invincible infantry with which he fought his Christian foes.

All the while a Serbian had only to kneel to Mecca to become one of the conquerors rather than one of the conquered. Many Serbs in Bosnia, many Christians in Bulgaria, Albania and Macedonia turned Moslems and their descendants today are among the most devout followers of the Prophet. But Serbia has the smallest Moslem population of any Balkan country.

The Serbs, becoming clansmen again, hid themselves with their crosses in the mountain gorges, where they kept the faith of their fathers and whence they spread terror and death among the apostates. Their church was their one rallying point and perhaps to this day they are less troubled by religious doubt than any other people in Europe.

Every Serbian home became a little kingdom and the family tie is strong among the Serbs. There is no such word as cousin in their language, all cousins being called brothers or sisters, among whom, of course, there can be no marrying. Serbia, therefore, offers an unusual test, if any one cares to examine it, of the effect on the race of avoiding consanguineous marriages.

The Slav is a democrat by nature and the Serbian ever has been most democratic. There is less looking up and looking down there than in the United States or in almost any other country. There are very few spots of earth that never have been pressed by the foot of a slave, and Serbia is one of them. It is the land of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Liberty remained through their long night the ruling passion of the Serbs. They set it to music, and, like the gleemen in Norman halls, chanting and fiddling their songs of freedom.

When all Europe was singing the Marseillaise in the wars that followed the French Revolution, Serbia joined the chorus, being the first to lift the standard of revolt in the Balkans. In 1804 she opened that struggle for the recovery of her long-lost independence which has lasted more than a century, and which never has been more desperate than now. Although by 1859 she had won the Sultan's recognition of her as a principality within the Turkish Empire, she did not free herself entirely from the Turk until as recently as 1878, when the Congress of Berlin declared her to be independent. Only in 1882, after half a thousand years, did she become once more a full-fledged kingdom.

The Austro-Serbian Feud.

But she was no longer rid of her Turkish overlord than she found herself threatened with an Austrian overlord. For a time Austria's diplomacy overcame the Serbian crown itself and by secret treaty she brought Serbia virtually into the position of a dependency. Her king actually was at the command of the Austrian military attaché at Belgrade until the dynasty was extinguished by a bloody assassination in 1902, when the present King Peter was called to the throne. Since then there has been no truce in the Austro-Serbian feud.

The Serbs are no less satisfied than the Austrians with their boundaries. Before the Balkan wars, the area of their country was but 15,000 square miles, and perhaps only half of that was in a state of cultivation for the support of a population of 2,000,000. Yet, however poor they were, the people did not know it, for they had neither millionaires nor paupers to remind them of their poverty. By the surest test of all, they were well off, for they had a smaller emigration than any of their neighbors, and it might be said that they had none at all. They were also the most homogeneous country in the Balkans, virtually all of them being of one race and creed.

But when the Serbs looked up and down the old road, they were always fearful that they might see the outlines of another conqueror coming to wrest from them their gate and their independence. Indeed, a more perilous place for a small nation could not be found on the map than that which the ancient Serbians accepted when they settled in the valley of the Morava.

For in an age of force and imperialism, Serbia occupies a military and commercial vantage point which none but a strong hand can hold. Yet pigheaded nature has denied her the soil to nourish and raise a great Nation powerful enough to guard the gate against covetous Empires.

To strengthen herself she entered the Balkan wars, and her gains in Macedonia almost doubled her territory and population. But her conquests aroused such furious jealousies and added so

much to her military obligations that her net profit from the transaction is small indeed.

Besides Austria had thwarted her chief ambition, which was for a port. With Austria-Hungary lying between her and Europe, with Greece, Albania, Montenegro or Bulgaria between her and the shore, she cannot ship a pig to market except by leave of some other country.

What Serbia wanted most of all was a seaport. But what she wanted above all was to draw together the subjugated Serbs and Serbo-Croats outside her frontiers and become the central power in a little world of kindred peoples, who would help her to guard the gate.

The Two Pans.

Nevertheless, as Serbia, rose she resolved to lift up all those fallen nations of her race. The Serbs are both politicians and historians. No one among them permits himself ever to forget that there is a Serbian King while the Hapsburgs were yet dwelling in their native haunts amid the Swiss mountains and that there was a Serb Empire before there was an Austrian.

The first object of the Serbians was to rescue the Slavs nearest them in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which still was nominally a Turkish province and which Austria occupied only on a lease issued by the Berlin Congress. At once there was a head-on collision between the Pan-Serb movement and a Pan-German movement

which Austria had started on her own account.

The Austrians boldly met the menace by formally annexing the disputed province, and, as they annexed it, Count Andrius confidently declared to Lord Salisbury in London, "We have our feet on the head of the serpent." But they had only scotched the snake; they had not killed it.

Everything Serbian was suppressed in the annexed province, even the folksong of the race. But open agitation only led to cover in a dark conspiracy. Finally this fanned out a year ago last June in the assassination of Crown Prince Ferdinand at Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and next in the conflagration of the great war which now envelops Europe. The fat of the two pans—Pan-German and Pan-Slav—was in the fire.

An Empire of Fallen Nations.

No matter where you look, you unfailingly find fallen nations at the bottom of all the trouble. Some men were discussing railway accidents and they arrived at the conclusion that 90 per cent of the casualties occurred in the rear car. "Leave it off," said one of them, quick to see the remedy.

Since the fallen nations of Austria-Hungary are at the bottom of this war, the obvious remedy is to restore them to their independence. But there would be little left of Austria-Hungary, for it is an empire of fallen nations.

On every hand the aged Emperor has been confronted and threatened throughout his long reign by a movement to snatch those jewels from his crown and restore them to their original, not to say rightful, owners. The irredentists—the redemmers—beset him on all sides. And see what they have already taken from him since he ascended the throne. The Prussian irredentists, his allies of today, stripped him of the overlordship of Germany, which Austria had claimed for hundreds of years. On the other hand, Italy irredentist recaptured Lombardy and Venetia.

Naturally he looked about to see where he might recoup himself for those heavy losses. In the west he saw united Germany. In the south, united Italy. In the North, the Russian Bear. In the east alone he saw a chance and to the east he turned his face. His ancestors had boasted themselves the legates of the Roman empire. Now the Hapsburgs should become the heirs of the Sick Man of Constantinople.

The Open Grave.

Francis Joseph took his first Eastward step when he claimed and received from the Berlin Congress the control of Bosnia-Herzegovina. His next logical step would take him through the upper gate on the old road to Empire. And only little Serbia stood in his way.

But when the Austrian Empire first entered upon this new departure and occupied Bosnia-Herzegovina, Prince Gortchakoff, the Russian Ambassador at Berlin, grimly remarked "The tomb of Austria is in the Balkans." That prophecy still runs. For there is yet a chance that the Austrian Empire may fall into the grave it dug for Serbia. The light is not winnowed. A people that for 500 years survived the exterminating Turk cannot be crushed in a season, swept from the road, they still have nature's impregnable forts for their refuge. Those mountains of Serbia are a weakness in her offense, but they become her strength in a long defense. And the Serb has not the tame desire of the Turk to die in bed.

The Serb, in a strangely prophetic spirit, anticipated the struggle and provided for it by bringing more boys than girls to the threatened Nation. The birth law of the world was reversed for Serbia, and when the storm burst upon her she had 1,000 men to 800 women.

Already the Serbs have done more than their part. With the veteran armies of powerful military Empires in front of them and the revengeful Bulgars behind them, they held up the Teutonic drive for weeks, while cleverly eluding the traps set for their feet. If Serbia's big, stupid allies will only do their part and profit by her terrible sacrifices, the Balkan campaign of the Austro-Germans will fall of its main purpose—permanent control of the old road to the East.

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AUSTRIAN HEAVY GUNS ADVANCING IN RUSSIA.



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The picture shows some of the Austrian Skoda guns of 30.5 centimeter caliber, being moved along the road to Wolynien, Russia, in the Austrian advance.